

College of Arts and Sciences
2019 Fall Address

Good afternoon, Welcome to the College of Arts and Sciences Fall address and awards ceremony. As the Interim Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences I would like to enthusiastically welcome each of you back to another exciting academic year. All of us in this College couldn't be more proud to be the intellectual heart of the University.

It feels surreal to me that it was a year ago that I stood before you as your newly appointed interim dean. Admittedly, I started with a good bit of naivete and had a steep learning curve, but I will be forever grateful for your patience and kindness as we worked our way through last year. And as I start the second year, this will continue to be a learning curve, albeit I hope not as steep, and I will remain grateful for your continued patience. Despite the responsibility I feel serving in this role, without a doubt, one of the greatest pleasures has been getting to know you, the faculty and your interesting research, which is something I rarely had the opportunity for when I was a chair in my home department. We hear so often that there is something special about ISU, that it becomes a platitude, but I can say it is true and I am reminded of this every day. ISU enjoys all the success and all our good metrics because of our outstanding faculty, and the leadership and mentorship they receive from our chairs and directors.

I also am quick to acknowledge that I am indebted every day to the expertise and collaborative spirit of the College of Arts and Sciences staff. I would never be able to have any modest amount of success if it weren't for their wise consultation, stewardship and commitment to our mission.

I would like to take a minute to introduce the College Office staff.

Sally Parry is the Associate Dean for Academic Programs and Student Affairs; Tony Crubaugh is serving for one year as the Associate Dean for Personnel, Budget, and Planning; and Joe Blaney is Associate Dean for Research, Facilities, and Technology. Debbie Fox is the Assistant Dean for External Relations, and is responsible for College events. Carrie Wieburg is our Business Manager, managing the budget and serving as the Dean's assistant. Tammy Hansen is the Administrative Aide, and Rebecca Brown serves as our Office Manager. We also

have two new graduate assistants in the office, Kacie Ryan from the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders and Kevin Myers from the Department of Kinesiology and Recreation. Please stop in and introduce yourself to Kacie and Kevin. They have quickly become part of our CAS family. Mike Regilio is the Director of CAS-IT, leading a team that assists faculty and staff with technology needs, in desktop support, web design, and advice on recent technology advances. Our Director of Development is Kate Childs who began on July 1 and has hit the ground running promoting the impressive story of the College of Arts and Sciences. I am pleased to work with this dedicated group of individuals whose commitment to the success of our students and faculty will continue to be critical to our growth as a College.

I view the role of interim dean and indeed all of us from the College office as servant leaders. The College is truly all of you, our faculty and staff in our departments, programs, and units and it is our role to be in service to the success and good work of each of you and your units and the students you serve. President Dietz frequently speaks of Illinois State University as “strong and stable”. And that has been the appropriately prudent path of stewardship for the University. But as I look around at all the energy within the College of Arts and Sciences, I would say we are a bit of an extension on “strong and stable”. Our faculty, staff, students and alumni are not prone to the comfort of complacency but rather are restless, eager, and hungry. I would say the culture of the CAS is “Strong and Stable, with a forward, leading edge”. In that spirit, I would like to speak of some important initiatives of our College as we progress forward. I have identified a list of 10 initiatives that I would like to focus on during the coming year. I have shared this list with the CAS Council of Chairs and will be presenting this to the College Council at our upcoming first meeting. I have left handouts in the back with the list of initiatives and invite your participation with me. I would like to address the top two initiatives which I see of great importance.

I have come to many of your opening faculty meetings and have emphasized the recent good news on enrollment data which appears to validate that students and families understand and appreciate that Illinois State University is a great investment. Perhaps you heard that the newly entering freshman count is up by 200 students from last year, and the two previous years were bumper crops. As you know, we are a bit special here at ISU. Families and students know that we

not only provide a premier education for our students, we do that in so many ways that connect our students to our greater world.

As we have enjoyed success with recruitment, we now also must have a parallel focus on retention. However, at Illinois State University, where we live our value of “individualized attention”, for us, retention is reframed as “Student Success”. We know that the students of today are not the same as our students 10 or even 5 years ago. They come to campus with real challenges. One in four college student report mental health symptoms with anxiety and depression being the most identified challenges. As the cost of higher education increases, middle- and working-class families struggle with the financial burdens, meaning our students carry the pressure to be successful quickly, and perhaps take on more of a load of student debt. These are the students who have added active shooter drills to the regular fire and tornado drills during their academic experience. As the diversity of our students has increased, so too has the number of first-generation students who might find the culture of higher education a foreign territory. When these students enter our classroom, their lives do not stay suspended, situated neatly outside, disconnected from their learning selves. We realize that to retain the bright minds we successfully recruited, we must find ways to partner with them to persist and be successful in life ways as well as academic ways. Now, I want to be very clear on this issue. Yes, this is an important issue to maintain our enrollment to remain strong and stable. But I can not be more clear in stating that this is not just a “numbers” issue for retention for a bottom line of enrollment. This is a social justice issue of access and inclusion. Access to a college degree is access to careers of fulfillment and overall success in life. A college degree can be the great equalizing antidote to historical and institutionalized marginalization of people who have been denied access. In addition to student success and retention being a social justice issue, it is also a moral issue. When we admit students and they take on student debt to pursue their degree, it is unconscionable for us to not partner with them for success lest they leave with mounds of debt and no degree. So, we will all be hearing much more about our role to promote student success. This is a top priority for us in the College of Arts and Sciences. We have dedicated many of our sessions of our faculty and staff professional development series to topics to help us partner with students for their success. We have extra brochures at the back if you need one.

A second priority that I have identified is to promote the narrative that a graduate with a liberal education has the broad transferable skills to adapt to a rapidly changing world, and thus are a good bet for employment. We read countless stories in the *Chronicle* or *Inside Higher Ed* that speak to the threat of programs in the arts and sciences. As enrollments in some majors decline or as financial pressures hit universities and proposed cost savings measures include elimination of programs or combining programs, we feel the heat within the liberal arts and sciences. Yet we know that students who graduate with the ability to think critically, who can communicate both orally and in written form, who have the interpersonal skills to work in teams, who know how to use data to inform problem solving, and who are committed to life-long learning are the most prepared for an economy that is rapidly changing, including jobs that have not even been invented yet. "Training" students for a specific job or career just is not the reality of many of our graduates nor the reality of many employment sectors who do the hiring. On average, people change jobs 12 times throughout their work lives and change entire careers 3-7 times during their lives. Our graduates from the Arts and Sciences are the broadly educated people that employers have a renewed realization of as assets to their companies and agencies. Many of you have heard me speak about an experience that the deans had with a major employer last May. Several of their top executives met with the Deans who proposed projects that would invite collaboration with their company. One of the consistent messages from their discussion is that they need employees with the broad transferable skills that a liberal education provides as these employees have the basic foundation of skills necessary to build upon for success. They also said the more interdisciplinary the employee's education is the more adaptable and well-rounded they find their skills for fulfilling careers. Our students from the College of Arts and Sciences are these people who are well-positioned and well-prepared for the economy of today and tomorrow.

Our initiative to advance the benefits of a liberal education includes promoting this narrative externally to prospective employers and students and families looking at Illinois State University as their choice for higher education while also promoting this internally with our own students. There are so many opportunities within the College of Arts and Sciences and indeed the university that students can distinguish themselves in unique ways so that their resume stands out when

they graduate. We plan to speak to students about doing more than passively going through their college career just completing a major. Rather, there are so many minors, particularly our interdisciplinary minors, that if strategically and intentionally chosen, could add a synergistic dimension to the student's skills and knowledge. If students add a minor in a foreign language they can "internationalize their major" making them valuable in the increasing global connections of society. Students should also think intentionally about a study abroad experience which always promises to be transformative. We want to encourage students to sign up for the honors program if they are eligible and to take advantage of their professors' networking and mentoring by getting involved in undergraduate research. We have a number of ways to advance this initiative that is more detailed on the sheet in the back of the room. I invite you, the faculty and staff of the College of Arts and Sciences to partner with us on this initiative. We know the value of a liberal education and we know how much we have to offer our students and students from across the university. You can see why I say that the College of Arts and Sciences is strong and stable, with a forwarding leading edge. It is from our strength and stability that we can change the world. We change the world by educating the next generation of leaders; we change the world through ground-breaking research that produces new discoveries and finds new integration of existing knowledge; and we change the world through our engagements in and service to communities beyond the walls of the campus. As I think of this, I am very hopeful for our future and grateful for your partnership.